

# **Music, Murals, and More**



**The Works Progress Administration  
in Louisiana**

## Music, Murals, and More

### The Works Progress Administration in Louisiana



Industrial Louisiana by Conrad Albrizio, circa 1935

The Industrial Louisiana mural once decorated the walls of the Governor's Reception Room in the Louisiana State Capitol building. The mural no longer exists.



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## FROM STATEHOUSE TO WPA HEADQUARTERS



On May 16, 1932, the New State Capitol was dedicated as the seat of Louisiana government. The former statehouse was abandoned and, at the request of former governor Huey Long, the furniture and books were stored in the State Museum in New Orleans.

In 1936, the Works Progress Administration established their administrative offices in the former statehouse and began extensive renovations to the interior and exterior of the building.

According to a 1938 publication of the depression-era periodical *WORK*, the state government and the WPA spent \$50,000

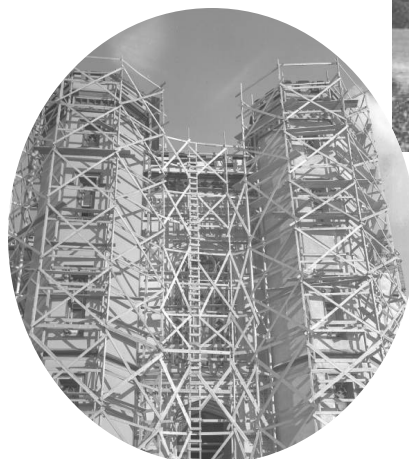
restoring the former statehouse “which will not only be an historic shrine but will house offices of the state government.”

Over 8,000 plants from Avery Island were used to landscape the historic grounds.

*Photographs from the Works Progress Administration Digital Collection, State Library of Louisiana*

*“On approaching the building, the green terraces, the old magnolia trees, the monument to Brigadier General Henry Watkins Allen, all tend to give the Old State Capitol a venerable atmosphere...Over all broods a feeling of antiquity, as if the ghosts of the great men of Louisiana who once passed through its halls had left a trace of their greatness behind them.”*

*Work Projects Administration, 1940*



WPA exterior  
renovations,  
Scaffolding, 1938

# Music, Murals, and More: The Works Progress Administration in Louisiana

## Lesson Plan

*During the 1930s and 1940s, Louisiana's Old State Capitol served as the Baton Rouge headquarters for the Works Progress Administration.*

### OVERVIEW

Music, Murals, and More invites students to explore the impact of the Works Progress Administration, one of the New Deal's most controversial agencies. Students investigate the WPA work and cultural projects in Louisiana.

*This lesson integrates whole-class and group collaboration as well as basic literacy strategies.*



|                |                       |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| <b>SUBJECT</b> | <b>SOCIAL STUDIES</b> |
| <b>GRADE</b>   | <b>8 AND 11</b>       |
| <b>TIME</b>    | <b>FLEXIBLE</b>       |

### OBJECTIVES

Students will

- List problems ordinary Louisianans faced during the Great Depression,
- Cite examples of the attempts of the government and citizens to solve these problems,
- Identify significant individuals responsible for the organization of the Works Progress Administration,
- Recognize the distinction between observation and inference when drawing information from documentary photographs.

### CONTENT LITERACY STRATEGIES

The Music, Murals and More lesson plan actively engages all students by using effective, varied and research-based literacy practices aligned with Louisiana's Comprehensive Curriculum.

The lesson integrates the following Content Literacy Strategies:

- |                                   |                        |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------|
| • Vocabulary Self-Awareness Chart | • GIST, or Summarizing |
| • Vocabulary Cards                | • RAFT Writing         |
| • Split-Page Note Taking Guide    | • Process Guide        |

## **BENCHMARKS AND GRADE LEVEL EXPECTATIONS**

### **Eighth Grade: Louisiana History**

51. Use economic concepts (e.g., scarcity, opportunity cost) to explain historic and contemporary events and developments in Louisiana (E-1A-M9)
58. Describe historical and economic factors influencing the economic growth, interdependence, and development of Louisiana and the nation (e.g., mass production, oil boom and decline) (E-1B-M7)
67. Analyze given source material to identify opinion, propaganda, or bias (H-1A-M4)
69. Propose and defend potential solutions to past and current issues in Louisiana (H-1A-M5)
70. Conduct historical research using a variety of resources, and evaluate those resources, to answer historical questions related to Louisiana history (H-1A-M6)

### **Eleventh Grade: American History**

13. Analyze source material to identify opinion or propaganda and persuasive techniques (H-1A-H4)
14. Interpret a political cartoon depicting an historical event, issue, or perspective (H-1A-H4)
15. Interpret or analyze historical data in a map, table, or graph to explain historical factors or trends (H-1A-H4)
16. Construct a narrative summary of an historical speech or address (H-1A-H5)
17. Conduct historical research using a variety of resources to answer historical questions related to U.S. history and present that research in appropriate format(s) (visual, electronic, written) (H-1A-H5)
18. Analyze causes and effects in historical and contemporary U.S. events, using a variety of resources (H-1A-H6)
37. Explain the expanding role of government as a result of the Great Depression and the New Deal and analyze the effects of the New Deal legislation (H-1B-H12)

### **Educational Technology Standards**

- Make informed choices among technology systems, resources, and services.
- Demonstrate knowledge and skills of Internet use and other resources consistent with acceptable use policies including the legal consequences of plagiarism and the need for authenticity in student work through an understanding of copyright issues.
- Refine knowledge and enhance skills in keyboarding, word processing, desktop publishing, spreadsheets, databases, multimedia, and telecommunications in preparing and presenting classroom projects.
- Collaborate with peers, experts, and others to compile, synthesize, produce and disseminate information, models, and other creative works.
- Use appropriate technology to locate, retrieve, organize, analyze, evaluate, and communicate information for problem solving and decision-making.



## **MATERIALS**

### ***Web sites***

- LOUISiana Digital Library, <http://louisdl.louislibraries.org>

### ***Reproducible Materials***

- Works Progress Administration Historical Overview
- Vocabulary Self-Awareness Chart
- Vocabulary Cards, optional
- Federal Project Number One Split-Page Note Taking Guide
- Works Progress Administration GISTing Guide Review Activity
- Works Progress Administration RAFT Writing Activity
- Speech Guidelines: Federal One and the Reorganization Act of 1939
- Speech Rubric

## **PROCEDURES**

1. Obtain background information on the Great Depression from the PBS Web site [The Great Depression](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/dustbowl/peopleevents/pandeAMEX05.html)  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/dustbowl/peopleevents/pandeAMEX05.html>
2. Use the Works Progress Administration Historical Overview reading to highlight the goals, contributions, weaknesses, and historical significance of the WPA.
3. Use the following activity sheets to help students build/master basic literacy strategies.
  - A. Vocabulary Self-Awareness Chart builds vocabulary skills
  - B. Federal Project Number One Split-Page Note Taking Guide focuses on how the different divisions within Federal One benefited the nation.
  - C. The GISTing, or summarizing, Guide helps students identify the most important words that describe the rise, accomplishments, and decline of the Works Progress Administration.
  - D. The RAFT writing activity asks students to use their knowledge of the Federal One programs and projects to develop a two minute speech that targets a specific historical audience.
4. Evaluation Instruments
  - A. Completed activity sheets
  - B. Speech Guidelines
  - C. Speech Rubric

**Memory Seymour, M.Ed.**  
**Director of Education**



# THE WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

## Historical Overview

The Works Progress Administration (WPA) was a massive employment relief program launched in the spring of 1935 under the direction of Harry Hopkins. The Works Progress Administration's philosophy was to put the qualified unemployed back to work in jobs which would serve the public good and conserve the skills and self-esteem of workers throughout the U.S. The WPA eventually employed approximately one-third of the nation's 10,000,000 unemployed.

Previous attempts to bring the Depression under control with the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), the Public Works Administration (PWA), and the Civil Works Administration (CWA) targeted mainly unemployed blue-collar workers by providing jobs in construction-related industries. The needs of professional and white-collar workers were largely ignored. The Works Progress Administration, part of Roosevelt's Second New Deal, not only continued to supply jobs in construction, but also opened opportunities for unemployed professionals including teachers, artists, and musicians.

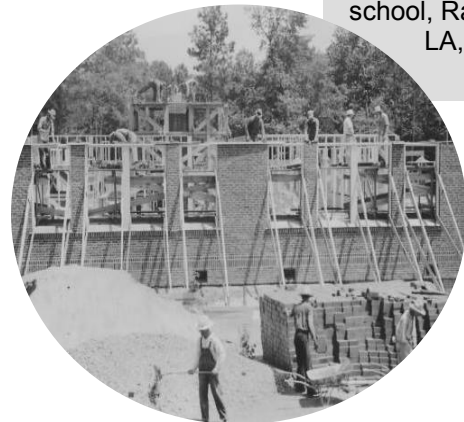
In Louisiana, the bulk of WPA spending went toward the construction and maintenance of the state's infrastructure, including street paving and bridge building. Smaller amounts funded the educational, recreational, and cultural programs of Federal Project Number One, or "Federal One," of the Works Progress Administration.

## Work Projects: Construction and Infrastructure

The WPA represented the largest program of its kind in American history. It put much-needed dollars into the hands of jobless millions and in the process contributed to the nation's infrastructure.

The 1935 publication, Guide to Eligibility of WPA Projects, identified 19 types of fundable work activities ranging from malaria control and construction of sewerage systems to recreational programs and street building. However, these jobs were viewed as temporary and were not intended to replace or compete with jobs in the private sector.

WPA compensation was based on a "security wage" which was an hourly amount greater than the typical relief payment but less than the wages offered by private employers. However, wages differed greatly from region to region and from state to state, and disparate wages was a constant source of dissatisfaction among workers. In 1937, a Tennessee construction worker averaged \$26 per month and WPA photographers, such as Dorothea Lange, earned approximately \$35 per month while musicians in New Orleans could make as much as \$96 per month.



Construction on school, Ragley, LA, 1936

As of 1940, the WPA had

- erected 4,383 new school buildings and made repairs and additions to over 30,000 others;
- built more than 130 hospitals and made improvements to another 1670;
- Laid nearly 9000 miles of new storm drains and sanitary sewer lines;
- planted 24 million trees;
- built or refurbished over 2500 sports stadiums around the country with a combined seating capacity of 6,000,000;
- paved or repaired 280,000 miles of roads and streets and constructed 29,000 bridges; and
- built 150 new airfields and 280 miles of runway (Office of Government Reports, 1939).

Table 1  
WPA Expenditures

| Year | Expenditure     |
|------|-----------------|
| 1936 | \$1,295,459,010 |
| 1937 | \$1,879,493,595 |
| 1938 | \$1,463,694,664 |
| 1939 | \$2,125,009,386 |

Source: Office of Government Reports, Statistical Section, *Federal Loans and Expenditures*, Vol. II, Washington, D.C., 1940.

To locate digitized primary artifacts related to the WPA work projects, please visit the [The Louisiana Works Progress Administration \(WPA\) Collection](http://louisdl.louislibraries.org) in the LOUISiana Digital Library (<http://louisdl.louislibraries.org>). Related links include the [Southwestern Louisiana Institute Photographs, 1923-1940 Collection](#) and the [Louisiana Farm Security Administration Photographic Collection](#)

## Federal Project Number One

*New Deal cultural projects took responsibility for our cultural commonwealth and for preserving and promoting minority cultures. They took on the task of recording history - including many parts otherwise deemed too painful or embarrassing to mention. More than that, they strove to promote cultural life where private action had failed or even done it positive harm.*

*Don Adams and Arlene Goldbard*

Federal Project Number One (Federal One) provided work relief for professionals and white-collar workers including the legions of artists, actors, writers, teachers, librarians, and musicians who lacked jobs. Federal One consisted of five major divisions: the Federal Art Project, the Federal Music Project, the Federal Theatre Project, the Federal Writers Project, and the Historical Records Survey.

- At its height in 1936, the **Federal Art Project (FAP)**, under the direction of Holger Cahill, employed over 5,000 visual artists and related professionals. The FAP murals division produced more than 2,500 murals in public buildings such as schools, libraries, post offices, and hospitals; the easel painting division produced nearly 108,000 paintings; and the sculpture division produced some 18,000 pieces. Other divisions included graphic arts, scenic design, poster design, and photography.



For a discussion of Louisiana's WPA artists, see [Art: an overview of art and crafts in Louisiana from the 1700s to the late 1930s](#) compiled by FWP authors in the 1930s. Related links include [The Louisiana Works Progress Administration \(WPA\) Collection](#), the [Southwestern Louisiana Institute Photographs, 1923-1940 Collection](#), the [Louisiana Farm Security Administration Photographic Collection](#) from the Center for Louisiana Studies, the [Frances B. Johnston Photograph Collection](#), and the [Franck-Bertacci Photograph Collection](#) in the LOUISiana Digital Library.

- As a result of the Great Depression, almost two-thirds of all professional musicians in the U.S. were unemployed. **The Federal Music Project (FMP)**, directed by Nikolai Sokoloff, employed around 16,000 musicians at its peak and presented an estimated 5,000 performances before approximately three million people each week. FMP performing units formed symphonies, orchestras, concert bands, and ensembles that gave performances in schools, community centers, settlement houses, orphanages, prisons, hospitals, public parks, and rented halls in urban and rural areas. The FMP also collected and recorded folk music and provided classes in rural areas and urban neighborhoods.

Digitized images of related primary artifacts can be found in the [Louisiana State Museum Jazz Collection](#), the [Actors and Musicians Photograph Collection](#), and [Louis Hasselmans' Musicians Photographs Collection](#) in the LOUISiana Digital Library.

- The Federal Theatre Project (FTP)**, under the direction of Hallie Flanagan, employed approximately 13,000 theater workers at its peak. Federal Theatre units in 31 states presented more than 1,000 performances each month. Orson Welles, John Houseman, Burt Lancaster, Joseph Cotten, E.G. Marshall, and Sidney Lumet began their acting careers working with FTP projects.

Digitized images of related primary artifacts can be found in [The Louisiana Works Progress Administration \(WPA\) Collection](#), the [Strand Theatre Collection](#), and the [Actors and Musicians Photograph Collection](#) of the LOUISiana Digital Library.

- At its peak in 1936, the **Federal Writers Project (FWP)** employed over 7,000 writers in all 48 states. The Federal Writer's Project, directed by Henry Alsberg and John D. Newsome, is best-known for its American Guide Series, a comprehensive encyclopedia of Americana. The American Guide Series produced comprehensive guidebooks for every state that included detailed descriptions of towns and villages, waterways, and historic sites and extensive collections of oral history and folklore. The Federal Writer's Project also produced priceless archives like the Slave Narratives. Among many other participants in the FWP were Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, Studs Terkel, Lyle Saxon, John Cheever, Saul Bellow, Margaret Walker, Arna Bontemps, and Zora Neale Hurston.

Digitized images of related primary artifacts can be found in the [The Louisiana Works Progress Administration \(WPA\) Collection](#) of the LOUISiana Digital Library.



**LOUISIANA: A GUIDE TO THE STATE**/Compiled by Workers of the Writers' Program of the Work Projects Administration in the State of Louisiana.—New York: Hastings House, 1941.

- The **Historical Records Survey**, under the leadership of Luther Evans, was the most financially efficient of all Federal One programs. HRS employed clerks, teachers, writers, librarians, and archivists to catalog, analyze, and compile inventories of state and county records. Other state materials included manuscript collections and church archives, bibliographies of American history and literature, a historical index of American musicians, and a collation of collections of presidential papers and messages.

Digitized images of related primary artifacts can be found in [The Louisiana Works Progress Administration \(WPA\) Collection](#) and the [Center for Louisiana Studies Archive Collection](#) of the LOUISiana Digital Library.

## Federal One and Censorship

*I am asked whether a theater subsidized by the government can be kept free of censorship, and I say, yes, it is going to be kept free from censorship. What we want is a free, adult, uncensored theater.*

Harry Hopkins, 1936

Despite Hopkins' pledge, the first act of censorship took place six months after this statement was made. At that time, the New York division of the Federal Theater Project's Living Newspaper project requested a recording of President Roosevelt's 1936 speech about Ethiopia. The intent of FTP writers was to use the speech contents in their production of *Ethiopia*, a play which portrayed Haile Selassie and Mussolini in the wake of the Italian invasion. Alarmed over the possible direction of the play and its portrayal of Roosevelt's foreign policy, the White House banned the impersonation of any foreign ruler on all Federal Theatre stages.

Although no widespread federal bans developed as a result of this incident, censorship and criticism continued to plague the various Federal One agencies.

- In New York City, the WPA director had three panels of the four-panel mural at Brooklyn's Floyd Bennett Airport torn down and burned after he saw a figure which looked like Lenin and a plane with a red star that looked Soviet. The artist's source photos proved the Lenin look-alike was really an early parachutist and the plane a U.S. model.
- In Illinois, the WPA administrator closed the Chicago Negro Company's performance of *Hymn to the Rising Sun* because the play dealt with the use of chain-gang labor in the South.
- Late in July, 1938, Representative J. Parnell Thomas of the House Committee to Investigate Un-American Activities (HUAC) claimed that he had "startling evidence" that the Theatre and Writers Projects were "a hotbed of Communists."
- Publication of the Massachusetts edition of the American Guide Series was halted because it contained 31 lines on the Sacco-Vanzetti case in which two Italian immigrant anarchist activists had been executed over nationwide protests (Sacco and Vanzetti were officially vindicated by the governor of Massachusetts in 1977).
- The New Jersey state guidebook in the American Guide Series was criticized for its depiction of the 1935 shipbuilders' strike that hinted at controversy between capitalism and labor.

## WPA Decline

By the late 1930s, WPA agencies and programs were the most frequent targets of New Deal critics and provided a ready target for FDR's enemies. A principal criticism of the WPA was that the program wasted federal dollars on projects that were not always needed or wanted. Businessmen charged that the work programs competed unfairly with private industry, and organized labor complained that the WPA undercut prevailing wages. Conservatives disliked the themes of social protest and the economic inequity associated with many of the programs devised by the Federal Theatre and Federal Writers Projects. Disaffected WPA workers added fuel to the fire by testifying that WPA projects were tools of the Communist Party designed to breed class hatred in the United States. These attacks led to the ultimate censorship: the termination of the projects.

The Reorganization Act of 1939 renamed the agency the Work Projects Administration and made it a part of the Federal Works Agency. The same act succeeded in eliminating the Federal Theatre Project and curtailing the remaining Federal One projects. Construction once again became the major focus of all WPA programs.

With the onset of World War II, the WPA focused on issues related to national defense. As the war-time economy rebounded, the need for WPA job assistance declined. Finally, all of the WPA agencies were eliminated in July 1943.

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## Vocabulary Self-Awareness Chart

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

How many of these words do you know?

### Directions

#### 1. Begin by placing a

“+” after each word you understand well, a

“√” after each word you think you understand, or a

“—” after each word you do not know.

#### 2. As you complete the Music, Murals and More: The Works Progress Administration in Louisiana activities, look for the meaning of these words. Your goal is to replace all the check marks (√) and minus signs (-) with a plus sign (+).

## Vocabulary Self-Awareness Chart

| Word/Phrase          | + | √ | - | Example | Definition |
|----------------------|---|---|---|---------|------------|
| blue-collar workers  |   |   |   |         |            |
| white-collar workers |   |   |   |         |            |
| infrastructure       |   |   |   |         |            |
| private sector       |   |   |   |         |            |
| oral history         |   |   |   |         |            |
| folklore             |   |   |   |         |            |
| inventory            |   |   |   |         |            |
| censorship           |   |   |   |         |            |
| communism            |   |   |   |         |            |
| anarchist            |   |   |   |         |            |
| capitalism           |   |   |   |         |            |

### Optional Activity: Vocabulary Cards

Use this template to prepare vocabulary cards. When you complete the cards, find a partner to quiz.

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|                   |                        |                        |
|-------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>Definition</b> | <b>Vocabulary Word</b> | <b>Characteristics</b> |
| <b>Examples</b>   |                        | <b>Illustration</b>    |

|                   |                        |                        |
|-------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>Definition</b> | <b>Vocabulary Word</b> | <b>Characteristics</b> |
| <b>Examples</b>   |                        | <b>Illustration</b>    |



**FEDERAL PROJECT NUMBER ONE**  
**Split-Page Note Taking Guide**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Split-Page Note Taking** helps you organize important information you gain from listening to class discussions and/or reading text selections.

**Directions**

As you investigate the different divisions within the Federal One division of the Works Progress Administration, take split-page notes about how each agency benefited the nation.

| <b>Strategy</b>                  | <b>Important Points</b> |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Federal Art Project</b>       |                         |
| <b>Federal Music Project</b>     |                         |
| <b>Federal Theatre Project</b>   |                         |
| <b>Federal Writer's Project</b>  |                         |
| <b>Historical Records Survey</b> |                         |

## Works Progress Administration GISTing Guide: Review Activity

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**GISTing, or summarizing**, helps you identify the most important words that describe the rise, accomplishments and decline of the Works Progress Administration.

### Characteristics of a gist or summary:

- shorter than the original text
- a paraphrase of the author's words and descriptions
- focused on the main points or events

### Directions

1. Under each column, write a list of 4-5 important words that support the column heading.
2. For each column, use the words you listed to write one sentence that summarizes the column heading.
3. Check your work. Read your three sentences. Do they contain the most important facts about the rise, accomplishments and decline of the WPA? Revise your word lists and sentences if needed.

## Works Progress Administration

| Led to the appearance of<br>the WPA                             | Accomplishments of the<br>WPA                                 | Reasons for Decline of<br>WPA                                 |
|---|---|---|
| 1. unemployment<br>2. _____<br>3. _____<br>4. _____<br>5. _____ | 1. _____<br>2. _____<br>3. _____<br>4. _____<br>5. _____      | 1. _____<br>2. _____<br>3. _____<br>4. _____<br>5. _____      |
| <b>GIST Sentence:</b><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br>   | <b>GIST Sentence:</b><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br> | <b>GIST Sentence:</b><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br> |

## Works Progress Administration RAFT Writing Activity

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**For this RAFT writing activity, you will step back into history.**

**The year is 1939. . .**

### **Background and Scenario:**

In the late 1930s, WPA agencies and programs, especially Federal One projects, are frequent targets of New Deal critics and FDR's enemies. In 1939, the Reorganization Act was introduced in Congress. If passed, the act will end or severely limit the actions of Federal One projects. Congress is conducting open hearings concerning the proposed Reorganization Act, and you are scheduled to speak to Congress tomorrow.

What advice will you give Congress? Should the Reorganization Act of 1939 be passed? Use the Decision-Making Process Guide to help you decide.

1. **R - Role:** You are a concerned citizen.
2. **A - Audience:** Your audience is the U.S. Senate.
3. **F – Form:** You will deliver a two-minute speech to the Senate.
4. **T – Topic:** The topic is the proposed Reorganization Act of 1939—should Federal One Projects be eliminated?

### **Decision-Making Process Guide**

#### **Directions**

1. With your group, brainstorm about the positive and negative effects of Federal One programs and projects. Refer to your Federal Project Number One Split-Page Note Taking Guide for ideas.
2. Take turns letting each group member present facts explaining why Congress should or should not pass the Reorganization Act of 1939.
3. Discuss the facts presented and reach a group consensus (everyone must agree) within your group.
4. Use the facts presented to write your two minute speech. See the RAFT Writing Guide and Speech Rubric for guidelines.

**Speech Guidelines  
RAFT Writing**

**Federal One and the Reorganization Act  
of 1939**

**Role: Concerned Citizen  
Audience: U.S. Senate, 1939  
Form: Speech  
Topic: Should the Reorganization  
Act (1939) be passed?**

**Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_**

**Part I. Plan your speech.**

**What are the main points you want to make in your speech?**

1.

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2.

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---

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**Who is your audience? Who do you want to convince?**

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**Part 2. Write and Practice Your Speech**

- Find research to back up your position.
- Read the Speech Rubric (next page) for help organizing and writing your speech.
- Make a chart or visual aid to go with your speech.
- Read your speech to a friend and revise it.
- Practice your speech orally. Underline words you want to emphasize.
- Be confident, look your audience in the eye! Have fun!

**Speech Rubric**  
**Guidelines for Speech Writing**

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Strong Speech**

- Uses at least four specific details to support opinions
- Well organized
- Effectively addresses the audience
- Uses persuasive language effectively
- Has no spelling or grammar errors
- Meets the time requirements

**Average Speech**

- Uses at least three specific details to support opinion
- Well organized
- Addresses the audience
- Uses persuasive language
- Has little or no spelling or grammar errors
- Meets the time requirements

**Weak Speech, Needs Improvement**

- Uses one or two specific details to support opinion
- Poorly Organized
- Attempts to address the audience
- Uses few examples of persuasive language
- Has many spelling or grammar errors
- Does not meet the time requirements

**Comments and suggestions**



## **Music, Murals, and More**

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